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PARK COLLEGE AND ITS ILLINOIS FOUNDER

BY PAULINE ASTON HAWLEY.

The traveler who finds his way up the road, and at the very entrance of Park College Campus at Parkville, Missouri, (quite within a suburban limit of Kansas City) discovers an elm tree of such stately build, such symmetry of form, such thickness of branch and twig (sequestered cloister for the timid ones of the feathered family!) that he stands in compelling admiration. Its richness and thickness of foliage give it the hush of a cathedral; its hidden branches undisturbed by the common wind. Calm and poised it stands, a sentinel, its boughs reaching protectingly over a certain gray little house on a bluff overlooking the Missouri river. Together the house and the tree share secrets of the past, some of which are written in the history of Missouri, and are transactions important in the annals of the State—yea, in the history of the world.

The little house, not always as gray nor so quiet, was the scene of large hospitality in the days of 1855 when Colonel George S. Park brought his New York bride to this pioneer home. For her he planted gardens of roses and other rare flowers. For her he set out orchards—and then with careful thought for the years to come, he selected a straight young elm and planted it close to the house where it would be protected from the south wind. A little daughter, the only child, came to complete the happiness in this bit of Eden, and under the ever widening branches she played with her dolls. But my story has not to do with the tree, but with the man who planted it and in vision saw it in its splendor of today. Colonel Park was a man of many visions, but it is of his great vision I would tell.

In a quaint hand-fashioned book with chipped wooden covers, written on pages that are yellowed with the years, in Colonel Park's own hand writing I quote from his prayer of May 15, 1834:

“Great and everlasting God . . . Graciously smile upon our efforts to quicken the intellect.”

Again on another page in an address to “The Youth of Jackson County” in 1839:

“*Dear* to me the cause of *Liberty* and virtue which alone can be sustained by the promotion of knowledge.”

Again—“Man is born to be educated. The very soil on which he treads is endowed with a thousand capabilities for production when excited by man’s intelligence.”

Like Lincoln, he studied and stored in his mind by the fire-logs’ glow or flickering candle—filling his hungering mind with knowledge of things about him, reaching out into history and poetry, philosophy and ancient languages. His college education was interrupted, but his longing for knowledge never ceased until life itself had done so. For fifty years he longed to found a college for the young men and women of the Missouri Valley who, because of lack of means, could not afford a college education elsewhere. In 1875 his ambition became a realization, and through his longings, his prayers, his unrelenting efforts, his generous gifts, Park College came into being. But even his great vision was short-sighted in the realization of what must have been once as a nebulous dream. For today, crowning the hills about the home of its founder, Park College stands with doors open not only to those of the Missouri Valley, but to the whole world.

Park College is different from any other college—a difference that explains the applications that come from everywhere, and which also explains the fact that annually hundreds are turned away for lack of room. For here no one is denied entrance for lack of funds. Ambition, character, and a willingness to work at least three hours a day at any task designated, are the qualifications. The dormitory accommodations take care of only three hundred fifty students—hence the student body is a “selected” one. Scholarship standards are high (Park is a member of the North Central Association of American Colleges), and only those whose reports show high grading are accepted. Park does not have a

restless, fluctuating faculty. Believing in the high Christian ideals, the sterling worth of the place, these men have tied themselves to the College, and having devoted their young lives, now at prime are giving rich experience in their teaching.

There is no time for Inter-Collegiate Athletics at Park—so the healthy, spontaneous enthusiasm that accompanies victories in the athletic field, finds its outlet over continued victories at Inter-Collegiate Debate and Oratory. For Park has been so in the habit of winning on the platform, that an eagerness and tenseness permeates the whole College family preceding a contest. And Park has its own time honored fashion of celebrating a victory which is not lacking in finesse of detail. The citizenship of Parkville long ago reconciled itself to “sitting up” and celebrating also when the Pajama Parade starts out on its program of announcement.

The “Family Life” at Park is its distinct feature, of course. There are eight dormitories for men and women, each presided over by—not a matron—but a housemother—there’s all the difference in the world! These women are by education, broad and cultured, of gentle breeding, and Christian character, well fitted to preside over the students. A home atmosphere is maintained and the most careful delicate thought given to the many problems which come up as in any co-ed school. The girls do all the cooking, serving, and housework. And they are taught the *better* way of doing these things. The boys, besides doing the daily chores (itself a considerable feature for such a large family) have done much toward the building projects of the Campus under capable superintendents, and many students have found their lead to a life work. Quoting a freshman’s views of family work: “Besides creating a better feeling of fellowship, it provides physical exercise for most of the students, and I think the good health record we have is partly due to the daily exercise at Family Work.”

The devotional life at Park is emphasized. Recently a student said to a new arrival, “I believe there are more good people at Park than in any one place I know.” In all the life

of the Campus, the teachings of Christ are the governing principles. Park College believes in a broad culture—the kind one absorbs without conscious effort. The importance of social grace and courtesy are not lost sight of. The seminaries are glad to enroll Park men, finding them the sterling type. The foreign mission boards look to Park for men and women volunteers, and as they go to far off countries, they tell of their beloved Alma Mater, and send native students to her from their various stations. So Park is almost as cosmopolitan as the world itself. Twelve countries and thirty states are represented in the present enrollment. The average cash payment by the students is small; an endowment commensurate with the annual expense and upkeep of the College, is still a far off thing even to the most optimistic trustee. But while the endowment is slowly climbing, friends of Park scattered over the country supply its needs with generous, prayerful gifts, and have done so faithfully through all these years of its fruitful history. Its Alumni, loyal and loving as members of a family, seem never to drift from the home feeling the College has given them.

During his life time, Colonel Park fostered and gave to the College not only time and money, and buildings and land, but wise judgment and prayerful thought. Modest; it was not his wish that the College be named for him. He wrote the charter, a document that shows marvelous safeguarding of the interests of the College, and also chose the first Board of Trustees. As an illustration of his thoroughgoing ideas I quote from Section four of the Charter:

“It is the earnest desire of the friends of this institution that it be established and built up by wisdom, and stand forever and go on improving like the older institutions of Europe and America. To accomplish this purpose it is suggested that the Board of Trustees look most critically into the way things are going and make wise provisions for future contingencies; if any trustee neglects such care and caution request him to resign and appoint another. It is a positive wrong to be indulgent to incapacity or inefficiency, to idleness, wastefulness or any other unfitness. Let the eyes of these guardians pierce

every nook and corner and thereby insure wise and skillful management of the institution. Let them provide the best instructors and make the best provisions for the institution their funds will permit, going no further, remembering that the Lord's work must be done better than our own."

Although the last years of his life were spent in Magnolia, Illinois, where he was a large land owner in that rich country, his interest in the College grew unceasingly. The little girl who played with her dolls under the tender shade of the young elm tree is now a leader in the womanhood of Illinois, Mrs. George A. Lawrence of Galesburg. Like her father she has stood for the finest in patriotism, the fostering of everything that is worth while. She is widely known for what she has been to state and country, and friend. She has taken up her father's work. Both she and her husband are life members of the Board of Trustees. They have given generously in buildings and land, and to current expenses, and their large giving has not kept them from constantly doing many things that add to the pleasure and comfort of the Campus and to individuals—the things that tell of her love and heart interest in the work and workers.

Today the old elm stands a splendid living monument to the man who planted it and methinks its gently moving branches whisper softly of his good deeds . . . "a ceaseless requiem." In antiphonal array the College buildings thronged with eager young life, speak imperishably of his thought and generosity, and his willingness to serve God by serving mankind; that was the impulse of Coloned Park's being—that through him others might live.